

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 13773

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, HK
SUBJECT: POLICE PROTESTS AND GOVERNMENT PARTIAL AMNESTY

SUMMARY: THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT TO ESTABLISHED ORDER IN
HONG KONG SINCE THE 1967 RIOTS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY
MET BY THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT. THE ISSUE CONCERNED A
PUTATIVE POLICE REBELLION AGAINST THE ACTIONS OF THE HKG'S
ANTI-CORRUPTION BODY. MASS POLICE PROTESTS AND A THREAT OF
STRIKE OVER CONTINUING ANTI-CORRUPTION ARREFLS AND INVESTIGA-
TION IN THEIR RANKS PROMPTED THE GOVERNOR TO ISSUE ON
NOVEMBER 5 A PARTIAL AMNESTY FOR CORRUPTION OFFENSES COMMITTED
PRIOR U JANUARY 1, 1977. OBLIVIOUS OF PUBLIC DISPLEASURE
OVER THE AMNESTY, THE POLICE OVERREACHED THEMSELVES WITH
DEMANDS FOR A FULL AMNESTY ACCOMPANIED BY THREATS
OF DEMONSTRATIONS AND STRIKES. THE GOVERNMENT PROMPTLY
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RESPONDED WITH EMERGENCY LEGISLATION PROVIDING
DISMISSAL FOR DISOBEDIENCE. THIS FORCED A POLICE
BACKDOWN. WHILE POLICE MORALE AND THE GOVERNMENT'S
ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE HAVE BEEN ADVERSELY AFFECTED,
DAMAGE HAS BEEN LIMITED AND NO THREAT TO THE PUBLIC
ORDER IS PERCEIVED. THE PRC HAS MAINTAINED A PASSIVE
ATTITUDE THROUGHOUT, MORE INTERESTED IN HK'S STABILITY

THAN IN THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE ISSUE. END
SUMMARY.

1. RESENTMENT WITHIN THE 17,000-MAN ROYAL HONG KONG POLICE AGAINST THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION (ICAC) HAS BEEN BUILDING SINCE THE LATTER'S ESTABLISHMENT IN FEBRUARY 1974. IT BROKE INTO THE OPEN TWO WEEKS AGO, FOLLOWING THE ARREST OF 34 OFFICERS ON CHARGES OF CORRUPTION DATING BACK TO 1971. THE POLICE HELD A SERIES OF OPEN MEETINGS SPONSORED BY FOUR POLICE WELFARE ASSOCIATIONS TO VENT THEIR ANGER. THE LARGEST OF THESE, TOTALING 5,000 MEN, ENDED ON OCTOBER 28 WITH A SMALL NUMBER OF SERVING AND RETIRED POLICEMEN STORMING THE ICAC HEADQUARTERS AND MANHANDLING ICAC OFFICIALS. DESPITE THE PUBLIC'S STRONG REACTION AGAINST THIS INCIDENT, DISSIDENT POLICE ORGAN NERS THEN CALLDH FOR DEMONSTRATIONS AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE AND ISSUED VAGUE THREATS OF "INDUSTRIAL ACTION", I.E. STRIKES. THROUGHOUT, NORMAL POLICE FUNCTIONS WERE MAINTAINED.

2. WHILE NOT DENYING THE VALIDITY OF CORRUPTION CHARGES, POLICE COMPLAINTS CENTERED ON THE ALLEGATION THAT THE ICAC WAS PERSECUTING AND HARASSING POLICEMEN WHILE OVERLOOKING CORRUPTION IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS. THE POLICE ALSO RESENTED EX POST FACTO INVESTIGATIONS
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OF PAST CORRUPTION WHICH TOOK PLACE WHEN CORRUPTION WAS TOLERATED IF NOT TACITLY APPROVED.

3. THESE POLICE COMPLAINTS GENERATED LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT. MANY CHINESE RESIDENTS FEEL THE POLICE ARE ARROGANT, HAVE TOO MUCH POWER AND ARE ALL TOO FREQUENTLY CORRUPT. THE PUBLIC WELCOMED THE ICAC CAMPAIGN AS THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORT IN HONG KONG.

4. PROMPTED BY CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF DISINTEGRATION OF POLICE DISCIPLINE AND A CONOMITANT THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER, THE GOVERNOR ON NOVEMBER 5 ANNOUNCED A PARTIAL AMNESTY WHICH PROVIDED THAT THE ICAC WOULD NOT NORMALLY ACT ON COMPLAINTS RELATING TO OFFENSES COMMITTED BEFORE JANUARY 1, 1977. THE AMNESTY EXCLUDED PEOPLE AGAINST WHOM WARRANTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN ISSUED, INVESTIGATIONS HAVE BEEN STARTED OR WHO ARE ABROAD. IT ALSO EXCLUDED "HEINOUS OFFENSES." THE GOVERNOR'S STATEMENT ALSO ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO MONITOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE ICAKWM

5. THE GOVERNOR'S AMNESTY WAS GREETED BY THE PUBLIC WITH OUTCRIES THAT THE HKG HAD CAPITULATED TO EXTORTION AND THREATS, AND WITH CALLS FOR A TOUGH GOVERNMENT STAND AGAINST FURTHER DEMANDS. OBLIVIOUS TO THE PUBLIC MOOD AND ENCOURAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE, THE POLICE OVERREACHED THEMSELVES WITH SUBSEQUENT DEMANDS FOR A FULL PARDON ACCOMPANIED BY THREATS OF A MARCH ON GOVERNMENT HOUSE. IN RESPONSE, THE GOVERNOR ON NOVEMBER 7 CALLED AN EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL WHICH PASSED TOUGH EMERGENCY LEGISLATION IN LESS THAN 20 MINUTES GIVING THE POLICE COMMISSIONER THE POWER TO DISMISS INSTANTLY ANY OFFICER WHO DISOBEYS AN ORDER. THE COMMISSIONER IMMEDIATELY BANNED ALL FORMS OF PUBLIC PROTESTS BY THE POLICE AND ORDERED THAT ADVANCE PERMISSION

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BE SOUGHT FOR ANY MEETING. THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT COLLAPSED AMID PLEDGES OF LOYALTY BY THE POLICE ASSOCIATIONS.

6. FOR THE MOMENT, THE THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER SEEMS TO HAVE PASSED AND THE TASK NOW IS TO REBUILD MORALE WITHIN THE FORCE. THE PARTIAL AMNESTY WILL HELP BY REDUCING THE ICAC THREAT TO THE FEW HUNDRED POLICEMEN WHO ARE PRESENTLY BEING INVESTIGATED.

7. WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED, HOWEVER, BY THE EARLY RETIREMENT OF POLICE COMMISSIONER SLEVIN, WHO HAS APPEARED INEFFECTUAL THROUGHOUT THE DISPUTE. MORE SPECULATIVELY, THE GOVERNOR'S CONCESSION TO THE LKICE MAY PROMPT THE RESIGNATION OF ICAC COMMISSIONER JACK CATER, A DEDICATED CORRUPTION FIGHTER PROBABLY SMARTING OVER THE CLIPPING OF THE ICAC'S WINGS.

8. PRC REPRESENTATIVES HAVE ASSUMED A VERY LOW PROFILE IN THIS MATTER. THE LOCAL PRC-CONTROLLED NEWSPAPERS HAVE CARRIED FACTUAL REPORTS WITHOUT ANY COMMENT. FROM THE HEADLINES, IT IS OBVIOUS THEIR SYMPATHIES DO NOT LIE WITH THE POLICE. THOUGH ONE CADRE DESCRIBED THE SITUATION AS "ONE DEVIL BITING ANOTHER", THE PEOPLE WHO LOOK AFTER PEKING'S INTERESTS HERE ARE MORE INTERESTED IN HK'S STABILITY THAN IN THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF THE ISSUE.

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